

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 OMB-01
IO-13 OPR-02 SY-05 DHA-02 OC-06 CCO-00 A-01
MCT-01 /086 W

-----191048Z 008394 /15

O P 190927Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 439

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 2683

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: ISLAMABAD 2663

SUMMARY

PNA MOUNTED DEMONSTRATIONS IN MANY PLACES ALL OVER PAKISTAN FOR A FIFTH CONDCUTIVE DAY MARCH 18. KARACHI APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THE WORST TROUBLE SPOT. TROUBLE IN LAHORE WAS LESS THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED BEFORE ARREST OF ASGHAR KHAN AND OTHER PNA LEADERS. WITH EXCEPTION OF MUFTI MEHMUD, ARRESTED LEADERS REMAIN IN DETENTION. GOVERNMENT IS EVIDENTLY CRACKING DOWN ON PRESS. REPORTS INDICATE THAT PNA INTENDS TO CONTINUE AND PERHAPS STEP UP ITS
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CONFRONTATION WITH GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING ARRESTS OF ITS LEADERS. VIEWS OF OBSERVERS HERE ABOUT WERE CONFRONTATION IS LEADING VARY WILDLY. DEVELOPMENTS OF NEXT FEW DAYS WILL BE OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT IN COMING TO ANY JUDGEMENT.
END SUMMARY

1. OPPOSITION PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE MOUNTED DEMONSTRATIONS

IN MANY PLACES ALL OVER PAKISTAN FOR A FIFTH CONSECUTIVE DAY MARCH 18. WORST TROUBLE APPEARS TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN KARACHI, WHERE AT LEAST ONE PERSON WAS KILLED IN CLASHES WHICH INVOLVED POLICE FIRING. (A REPORT JUST RECEIVED HERE FROM A WIRE SERVICE SOURCE IN KARACHI SAYS THAT CLASHES HAVE BROKEN OUT THERE THIS MORNING, MARCH 19.) IN LAHORE, WHERE ASGHAR KHAN WAS TO HAVE LED A LARGE PROCESSION, DISTURBANCES WERE AT CONSIDERABLY LOWER LEVELS THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED BEFORE ARREST OF AIR MARSHAL AND OTHER PNA LEADERS THERE.

2. IN KARACHI, POLICE MOVED PROMPTLY TO BREAK UP OSTPRAYER PROCESSIONS. THESE WERE REPORTEDLY ON A GREATER SCALE THAN THEY HAD BEEN THE DAY BEFORE, BUT NOT AS LARGE OR NUMEROUS AS RUMORS CIRCULATING IN THE CITY EARLIER HAD SUGGESTED. (THESE HAD HAD IT THAT AS MANY AS 25 PROCESSIONS WOULD BE TAKEN OUT.) CLASHES CONTINUED FOR SEVERAL HOURS AS POLICE CHASED DEMONSTRATORS INTO SIDE STREETS AND USED SHOTGUNS, TEAR GAS, AND LATHIS, AGAINST STONE-THROWING CROWDS. FIFTEEN VEHICLES WERE SET AFIRE. ACCORDING TO CBS CAMERAMAN DEREK WILLIAMS, WHO ONCE AGAIN GOT GOOD FOOTAGE OF ACTION, ARMY AGAIN PLAYED MEDIATION ROLE AND NEGOTIATED POLICE DISENGAGEMENT FROM DEMONSTRATORS. ONE WIRE SERVICE REPORTS ACTUAL NUMBER KILLED WAS THREE; ANOTHER SAYS FIVE. GOVERNMENT ADMITS TO ONE. THERE WERE MANY ARRESTS.

3. IN LAHORE, POLICE USED LATHIS AND TEAR GAS TO BREAK UP PROCESSION. NO POLICE FIRINGS HAVE BEEN REPORTED. A BUS WAS SET AFIRE. ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE AMERICAN SOURCE, ARMY HAS RETURNED IN COMPANY STRENGTH TO JINNAH GARDENS AND PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING IN CENTRAL PART OF CITY. BATTALION HEADQUARTERS HAS

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BEEN SET UP AT QADDAFI STADIUM IN CANTONMENT AREA. THE ARMY HAS NOT BEEN DEPLOYED ON THE STREETS. HOWEVER, ARMED POLICE UNITS ARE MUCH IN EVIDENCE, ESPECIALLY IN THE OLDER PARTS OF THE CITY.

4. OTHER FOCUSES OF TROUBLE IN THE PUNJAB WERE MULTAN, LYALLPUR, AND RAWALPINDI. FEDERAL SECURITY FORCE WAS REPORTEDLY USED IN MULTAN (WHICH HAD HAD 48 HOUR HARTAL WEDNESDAY/THURSDAY) AND LYALLPUR. EYEWITNESSES IN PINDI REPORT THAT IN RAJA BAZAAR AREA OF OLD CITY THERE SEVERAL THOUSAND SYMPATHIZERS GATHERED OUT--SIDE MOSQUE, CHEERED PNA LEADERS WHO SUCCESSFULLY COURTED ARREST, SHOUTED SLOGANS, AND REFUSED TO DISPERSE. STONING OF POLICE BY DEMONSTRATORS, AND TOUGH POLICE LATHI CHARGES AND TEAR GASSING FOLLOWED. CLASHES CONTINUED FOR SEVERAL HOURS.

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CINCPAC PRIORITY

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

5. WITH EXCEPTION OF MUFTI MEHMUD, WHO WAS RELEASED IN PESHAWAR (A RELATIVELY QUIET AREA YESTERDAY) AFTER A FEW HOURS IN DETENTION, ARRESTED PNA LEADERS ARE STILL LOCKED UP. A GOVERNMENT PRESS NOTE ANNOUNCING THEIR ARREST SAID THAT "LAWLESSNESS WAS REATED IN THE COUNTRY BY THE UNCONSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF SOME OF THE LEADERS" OF THE PNA. THE GOVERNMENT HAD THEREFORE BEEN FORCED TO ARREST THEM. THE LIST INCLUDED SINDHI LEADER MIR ALI AHMED TALPUR. (MUFTI MEHMUD WAS APPARENTLY CHARGED ONLY WITH VIOLATING SECTION 144 IN LEADING A PROCESSION IN PESHAWAR.) ACCORDING TO CONGEN LAHORE, ASGHAR KHAN AND SEVERAL OTHERS PICKED UP IN LAHORE EVENING OF MARCH 17 ARE BEING HELD UNDER VERY HEAVY GUARD IN A REST HOUSE SOME TWENTY MILES FROM LAHORE NEAR THE INDIAN FRONTIER. THE DETENTION OF ASGHAR KHAN AND OTHERS IS BEING CHALLENGED IN THE LAHORE HIGH COURT, WHICH HAS REPORTEDLY AGREED
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TO THE PLEA THAT THEY NOT BE REMOVED FROM THE PUNJAB PROVINCE.

6. AT HIS WIDELY ANTICIPATED PRESS CONFERENCE IN LAHORE MARCH 18 FOLLOWING THE ARRESTS OF THE PNA LEADERS, ALLIANCE SECRETARY

GENERAL GHAFOR AHMED REITERATED EARLIER PNA DEMANDS INCLUDING DEMAND FOR RESIGNATION OF PM AND HOLDING OF FRESH ELECTIONS UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE ARMY AND THE JUDICIARY. HE INSISTED, CONTRARY TO ASSERTION OF GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN EDUCATION MINISTER PIRZADA, THAT CONSTITUTION DID NOT HAVE TO BE AMENDED TO ALLOW FOR A NEW POLL. GOVERNMENT, ON ITS PART, ANNOUNCED ENACTMENT OF PRESIDENTIAL ORDINANCE DESIGNED TO FACILITATE PROCESSING OF ELECTION CHALLENGES. THIS HAD BEEN PROMISED LAST WEEK BY PRIME MINISTER AND IS PART OF THE "REASONABLE OFFER" BHUTTO HAS PLACED BEFORE THE OPPOSITION AND THE PUBLIC TO SETTLE THE PRESENT CONFRONTATION.

7. WE UNDERSTAND THAT BBC THIS MORNING REPORTED THE IMPOSITION OF PRESS CENSORSHIP IN PAKISTAN. WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF THIS. HOWEVER, IT IS NOW OBVIOUS THAT GOVERNMENT IS EXERTING STRONG PRESSURE ON ALL SECTIONS OF THE PRESS TO PLAY DOWN THE DISTURBANCES. WE NOTE THAT NAWA-I-WAQT, WHOSE COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTS OF OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES HAVE GREATLY INCREASED ITS CIRCULATION, CARRIED NOTABLY SKIMPY REPORTS FROM ITS CORRESPONDENTS ON TROUBLE IN PUNJAB AND ELSEWHERE AND LED OFF WITH GOVERNMENT PRESS NOTES GIVING OFFICIAL VERSION OF CLASHES. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT KARACHI TABLOID EVENINGERS MARCH 18 WERE GIVEN STRICTEST INSTRUCTION NOT TO MENTION PNA ARRESTS. THEY COMPLIED.

8. REPORTS FROM LAHORE, KARACHI, AND PINDI INDICATE PNA INTENDS

TO CONTINUE AND PERHAPS STEP UP ITS CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT FOLLOWING THE ARRESTS OF ITS LEADERS. VIEWS OF OBSERVERS ABOUT WHERE THIS CONFRONTATION IS LEADING VARY WILDLY, RANGING FROM THOSE WHO SAY BHUTTO COULD BE OUSTED IN A WEEK TO A MONTH, TO THOSE WHO PREDICT HE WILL WEATHER THIS STORM AS HE HAS OTHERS. DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NEXT FEW DAYS, WHEN THE PNA WILL

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DEMONSTRATE TO WHAT EXTENT IT CAN SUSTAIN ITS CONFRONTATION IN THE ABSENCE OF MANY OF ITS LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS, WILL BE OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT IN COMING TO ANY JUDGEMENT.
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